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SUBJECT: GERMAN GOVERNMENT, IRANIAN-GERMAN COMMUNITY REACTS
TO PRESIDENT'S NOW RUZ GREETING

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BERLIN 00000340 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: Acting Minister Counselor for Political Affairs Stanley Otto for reasons 1.4(b)/(d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: The German government, senior Bundestag members, and prominent members of Germany's Iranian community have responded positively to President Obama's Now Ruz message to the Iranian people and government. Chancellor Merkel noted that the message reflected a European desire for an offer to be made to Iran, while FM Steinmeier lauded the Administration's willingness to rethink U.S. policy on Iran and expressed optimism that the message would find its audience in Tehran. Senior Bundestag MPs also made positive statements regarding the Now Ruz message. Germany's large Iranian community, including those who are at times skeptical of USG intentions, have also praised the message, citing its commitment to diplomacy and its resonance in the Persian-language blogosphere.

12. (U) CHANCELLOR MERKEL, FM STEINMEIER LAUD NOW RUZ MESSAGE: Reacting to President Obama's Now Ruz message, Chancellor Angela Merkel said in a joint press conference with FM Frank Walter Steinmeier in Brussels on March 20 that the message reflects a European wish for "an offer (to be made) to Iran" and hope that it would be considered. FM Steinmeier added that President Obama's message is "proof that the American President is really willing to rethink the U.S.'s policies on Iran." Noting that everyone remembers the reasons for the break in relations 30 years ago, he added that messages addressing not only the Iranian President, but especially the Iranian people, are "correct." Such messages show that the U.S. not only wants a solution to the nuclear conflict, but is also interested in the re-establishment of Iranian-American relations, he said. He expressed the belief that the President's message will "find its audience in Iran."

13. (U) SENIOR BUNDESTAG MPS SEE U.S. POLICY COURSE CHANGE, CALL ON IRAN TO ACT CONSTRUCTIVELY: President Obama's message also received praise from key Bundestag members. Foreign Affairs Committee Chair and Iran specialist Ruprecht Polenz (CDU) told the New Osnabruecker Zeitung on March 21 that Iran is now on the hook to grasp President Obama's "outstretched and open hand." He added that Tehran could underscore its willingness for dialogue by participating in the upcoming Afghanistan conference. He called the video message a "key and clever step" which demonstrates that the US President is seeking discussions without preconditions. In a statement, SPD Foreign Policy Spokesman Gerd Weisskirchen said President Obama's initiative had "broken the ice." Now it's up to Tehran to accept this opening move

towards a new relationship, he said; whether the Iranian authorities act constructively will now determine if relations between the two countries can be improved.

¶4. (U) INITIAL IRANIAN COMMUNITY REACTION SPANS FROM POSITIVE TO ELATION: Prominent members of Germany's large Iranian community have also commented in the German press as well as to Post their generally positive reaction to President Obama's Now Ruz message. Iranian-German Bundestag MP Omid Nouripour (Greens) focused on the reaction of the Iranian diaspora in a contribution to Spiegel Online. According to Nouripour, the President's message was the sole topic in his traditional No Ruz congratulatory telephone calls, with friends and relatives saying "they had cried out of pride or for joy." Nouripour noted that, as uncertainty grows regarding the outcome of the June Presidential election, President Obama's message is especially valuable because it is addressed to the entirety of the Iranian people, and not just the office of the Iranian President. The Iranian people in turn, writes Nouripour, feel a deep longing for exactly what President Obama has offered them: a respectable place in the world. The U.S. offer is all the more disarming, Nouripour adds, because (in his interpretation) the military option has essentially been taken from the table.

¶5. (U) BLOGGERS SAY "TOO BAD OBAMA ISN'T OUR PRESIDENT": Nouripour also notes the positive reaction from the Persian-language blogosphere. According to Nouripour, bloggers have celebrated the President's use of Farsi, as well as the mention of Saadi's poem, a poem familiar to every Iranian child and a symbol of Iran's pride in belonging to the international community. Nouripour notes one blogger's comment: "We call 'Down with America' and they send us New

BERLIN 00000340 002.2 OF 002

Year's greetings-- what a shame for us as a cultural nation." Another blogger wrote: "too bad that Obama isn't our president!"

¶6. (U) In an analysis published in the left-leaning "die tageszeitung," avowed leftist and longtime critic of U.S. policy Bahman Nirumand was unusually positive in his analysis of President Obama's video message, noting that the President had praised the cultural and spiritual greatness of Iran. He noted that this offering from Washington has placed the IRIG in a quandary, given that the leadership in Iran has transformed anti-Americanism into an ideology that belongs to the most important pillars of the religious state. How can the Iranian regime make a fundamental change plausible to the public, posited Nirumand. At the same time, he notes, Tehran knows that repulsing the open hand from Washington could have wide-ranging consequences and could legitimate tougher sanctions or even military intervention. Thus, Tehran will first attempt to maneuver and call for broad, practical concessions, he concluded.

¶7. (C) Privately, Iranian contacts in Berlin have also expressed (at times, very emotionally) their positive reaction to President Obama's message. A German-Iranian journalist and human rights activist told PolOff that the President's speech was convincing and "incredible," calling the message's elements "the right mix of spices." She praised how the message speaks to the leadership but especially to the people of Iran, approved of the message's use of Iran's ancient culture, and expressed her personal liking of President Obama (a first for this contact). Noting her generally critical viewpoint of the United States, she said that the President's message demonstrated that the U.S. can take a step in the right direction "without grand politics, tricks, or wars." She expressed disappointment in the Iranian Supreme Leader's response, but noted that she was not surprised. She called Khamenei "impolite" for not mentioning President Obama's greeting. A 20-something Iranian art student also effusively praised President Obama's message, in particular the use of Persian poetry and

language. He added that it was the first time he felt that a symbolic act could have an effect on broader geopolitical issues.

¶ 18. (C) Another contact, a long-time regime change supporter, expressed cautious optimism that President Obama's initiative would bear fruit. In stark contrast to earlier meetings, where he advocated military measures against Iran, he noted that it is good that the U.S. is pursuing all options, and that diplomacy is better than "other options." He noted that Khamenei, in his March 21 speech in Mashhad, had now taken the initiative and proven once again that it is he, "not the Iranian people or (other elements of) the government" who holds final authority.

¶ 19. (U) Post will continue monitoring German press reaction and soliciting responses from Germany's Iranian diaspora community and report septel.

Koenig